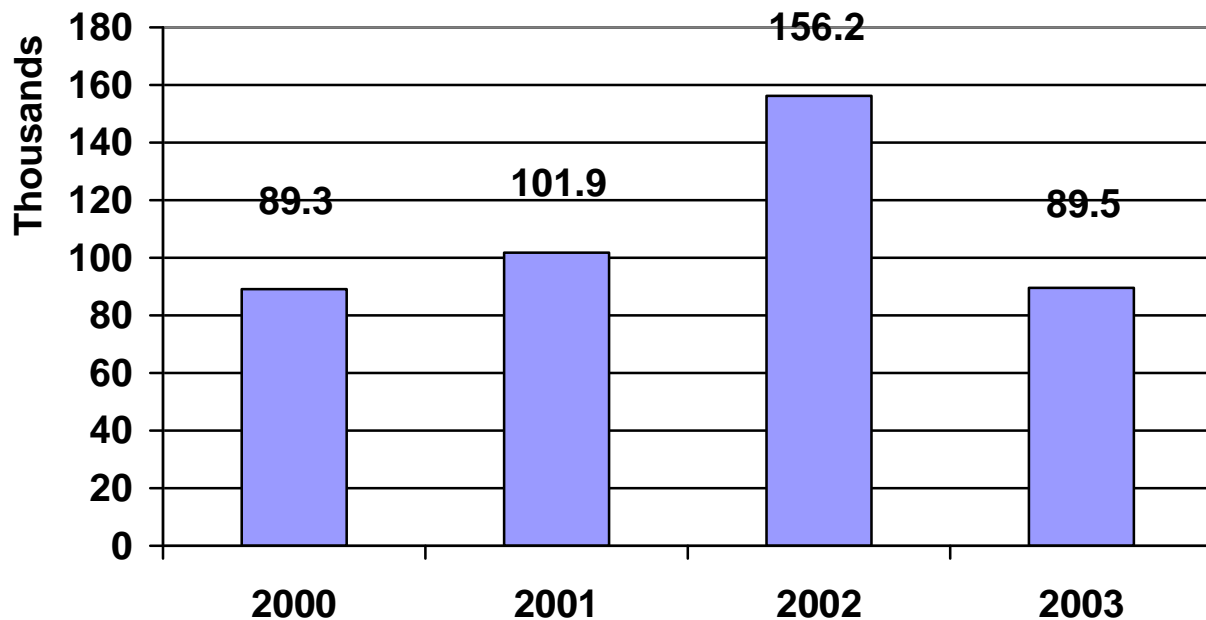


IV. PARK AND RECREATION DEMAND AND TRENDS

ANNUAL VISITATION TRENDS

Gorges State Park does not have a long history of visitation. The park was only established in 1999, and to date only minimal facility development has taken place. Figure IV-1 shows the park's annual visitation from 2000 through 2003. Visitation from January through March of 2001 is estimated. The Grassy Ridge Access opened April 9, 2001, and the Frozen Creek Access opened July 1, 2001. As additional facilities are developed, visitation to Gorges State Park should increase substantially.

Figure IV-1. Annual Visitation

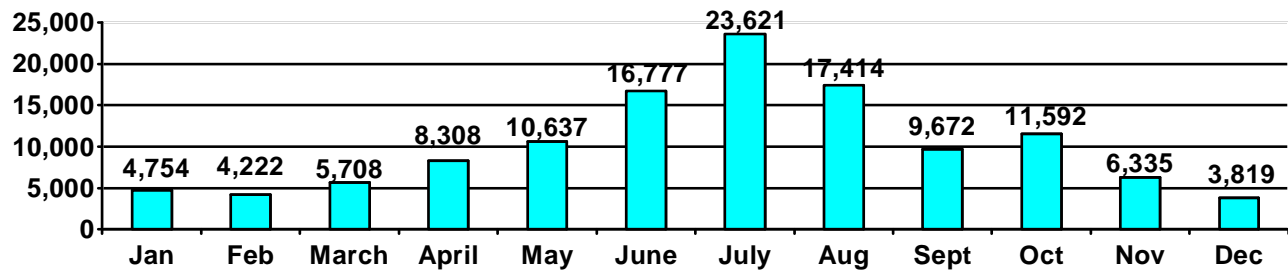


Traffic counters at the two accesses are used to determine visitation, using a per vehicle multiplier of three persons. Visitation dropped 42.7 percent from 156,185 in 2002 to 89,526 in 2003. During 2003, Transylvania County experienced one of the highest annual amounts of rainfall on record, concomitantly dampening travel and tourism. The park was also closed during parts of the popular 4th of July and Labor Day weekends due to staff involvement in rescue efforts at the Horsepasture River.

MONTHLY VISITATION TRENDS

Gorges State Park's monthly visitation is largely seasonal, with dramatic differences in visitation between the cold and warm weather months (Figure IV-2). Visitation increases with the arrival of warmer spring weather, peaks in July of the summer months, and then - except during a jump for the peak fall leaf season - decreases as the temperature drops.

Figure IV-2. Average Monthly Visitation 2002-2003



The monthly visitation pattern leads to an obvious conclusion concerning the desirability of using seasonal and peak load personnel to help staff the park during months of higher visitation.

VISITOR INFORMATION

In 1987 the United States Forest Service was contracted by the Department to conduct a Public Area Recreation Visitors Survey (PARVS) for the North Carolina State Parks System, designed to identify visitor socio-economic characteristics and economic contribution to the state's economy. While Gorges State Park was not one of the eight parks involved in the survey, general information concerning state park visitors is useful in assessing visitation trends at the park.

Why do people visit state park units? The convenient location was cited by 31 percent of the respondents; 25 percent thought other areas were too crowded; 21 percent liked the quality facilities; 8 percent wanted to try a new area; 7 percent enjoyed the scenic beauty; and 6 percent came to see the attraction.

More than one-third (37 percent) of state park visitors come from within a 30-mile radius, while 17 percent come from 30 to 60 miles away. Survey respondents indicated that the parks were their sole destination 86 percent of the time. While many visitors come from nearby, the average one-way distance traveled was 139 miles. Approximately 25 percent of state park visitors come from out of state. These visitors averaged 4.1 trips per year to North Carolina state parks.

Seventy-eight percent of those surveyed indicated that they were return visitors. The average number of return trips per year was six. Sixty-one percent of visitors statewide came with family

members, 16 percent with friends, and 7 percent with both family and friends. Ten percent of visitors came alone. Visitors also came in small numbers in organized groups and multiple families.

PARVS data indicates that 16.8 percent of groups surveyed used more than one car, and that the average number of persons per car was 3.0. The average age of the park visitor was 38.2 years. The age distribution was as follows:

Table IV-1. Percent of Visitors by Age Group

<u>Under 6</u>	6-12	13-18	19-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	Over 65
6.7	11.6	10.6	12.5	20.1	16.9	0.9	7.3	4.4

Since over 18 percent of visitors are under the age of 13, a demand exists for children's programs and facilities. Approximately 12 percent of visitors are 56 and older. This older segment of the general population will be increasing, and as it does, demand for improved quality, accessibility, and safety should increase.

OUTDOOR RECREATION PARTICIPATION IN NORTH CAROLINA

The five most popular outdoor recreation activities in North Carolina are walking for pleasure, driving for pleasure, viewing scenery, participating in beach activities, and visiting historical sites. Three out of every four households participated in walking for pleasure at least once in the past 12 months (Table IV-2). In addition to the five most popular activities, over 50 percent of the households responding to a 1989 survey participated at least once in the following activities: swimming (in lakes, rivers, or oceans), visiting natural areas, picnicking, attending sports events, visiting zoos, and freshwater fishing.

The North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Participation Survey was mailed to 3,100 randomly selected residents in the spring of 1989. Forty-five percent, or 1,399 people, returned completed surveys. Each person receiving the survey was asked to estimate the number of times that household members had participated in each of 43 activities. The survey results provide good insight into the current participation of North Carolinians in a wide range of outdoor recreation activities. The survey results also closely mirror those of the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment conducted in 1994-1995 and 2000.

Table IV-2. Outdoor Recreation Activities Ranked by Popularity.

RANK	ACTIVITY	PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS PARTICIPATING
1.	Walking for Pleasure	75%
2.	Driving for Pleasure	72
3.	Viewing Scenery	71
4.	Beach Activities	69
5.	Visiting Historical Sites	62
6.	Swimming (in Lakes, Rivers, and Oceans)	54
7.	Visiting Natural Areas	53
8.	Picnicking	52
9.	Attending Sports Events	52
10.	Visiting Zoos	51
11.	Fishing - Freshwater	50
12.	Use of Open Areas	41
13.	Swimming (in Pools)	40
14.	Fishing - Saltwater	38
15.	Attending Outdoor Cultural Events	35
16.	Bicycling for Pleasure	32
17.	Other Winter Sports	31
18.	Camping, Tent or Vehicle	29
19.	Softball and Baseball	28
20.	Hunting	28
21.	Use of Play Equipment	28
22.	Power Boating	26
23.	Trail Hiking	26
24.	Jogging or Running	24
25.	Basketball	24
26.	Nature Study	22
27.	Golf	22
28.	Target Shooting	20
29.	Water Skiing	19
30.	Camping, Primitive	14
31.	Tennis	14
32.	Use Motorcycles, Dirt Bikes, ATVs	13
33.	Use Four Wheel Drive Vehicles	13
34.	Canoeing and Kayaking	13
35.	Horseback Riding	12
36.	Volleyball	12
37.	Downhill Skiing	12
38.	Football	11
39.	Soccer	7
40.	Sailboating	7
41.	Skateboarding	6
42.	Cross Country Skiing	2
43.	Windsurfing	1

PRIORITIES OF PUBLIC OUTDOOR RECREATION FUNDING

The North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Survey asked residents a series of questions in order to identify and rank order future demand for various types of public outdoor recreation activities. Future demand was determined by asking them which activities they would have tried more often had adequate facilities been available. Respondents were then asked to rank these activities in order of importance. A scoring system was used assigning each activity a rating of high, moderate or low future demand based on the survey results.

In the second part of the analysis, the respondents' level of support for publicly funded outdoor recreation activities was determined by asking them to identify and rank those activities to which government should give highest priority when spending public money. The same scoring system used to analyze unmet demand was then applied to the survey results, with each activity receiving a high, moderate or low rating in public support for public funding.

In the final part of the needs analysis, the two ratings for each activity were combined to produce a score from one to nine that reflected both future demand and public funding priorities. The activities that ranked high in both future demand and support for public funding received the highest priority in the needs assessment. Support for public funding was given higher priority than expressed demand (Table IV-3).

Table IV-3. Priorities for Future Outdoor Recreation Activities

ACTIVITY	CODE	FUTURE DEMAND	SUPPORT FOR PUBLIC FUNDING
Walking for Pleasure	1	High	High
Camping, Tent or Vehicle	1	High	High
Picnicking	1	High	High
Beach Activities	1	High	High
Fishing - Freshwater	1	High	High
Attend Outdoor Cultural Events	1	High	High
Visiting Natural Areas	2	Moderate	High
Use of Play Equipment	2	Moderate	High
Visiting Zoos	2	Moderate	High
Visiting Historical Sites	2	Moderate	High
Bicycling for Pleasure	3	High	Moderate
Swimming (in Pools)	3	High	Moderate
Viewing Scenery	4	Moderate	Moderate
Hunting	4	Moderate	Moderate
Trail Hiking	4	Moderate	Moderate
Use of Open Areas	4	Moderate	Moderate
Target Shooting	4	Moderate	Moderate
Swimming (Lakes, Rivers, Ocean)	4	Moderate	Moderate
Fishing - Saltwater	4	Moderate	Moderate

AREA OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Transylvania County, in which Gorges State Park is located, and surrounding counties are home to a variety of outdoor recreation areas. A brief description of some of these follows.

Blue Ridge Parkway

The popular Blue Ridge Parkway runs 469 miles from Shenandoah National Park in Virginia to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. It passes along the Transylvania County – Haywood County line. At Mt. Pisgah (milepost 408.7), camping for 70 tents and 67 trailers is provided. Facilities include water and restrooms but no showers or hook-ups. A 50 – site picnic area and several trails are nearby. Mt. Pisgah is the highest developed recreation area along the parkway. (www.nps.gov/blri/)

Cradle of Forestry in America

This 6,500 acre historic site within the Pisgah National Forest was established by Congress to commemorate the beginning of forestry conservation in the United States. Located in northern Transylvania County, it features an educational film, interactive exhibits, guided trails, historical buildings, logging locomotive, old sawmill and special programs and events. (www.cradleofforestry.com)

DuPont State Forest

DuPont State Forest, located southeast of Brevard in Transylvania and Henderson counties, offers 10,400 acres of beautiful forest that features four major waterfalls on the Little River and several on Grassy Creek. The forest provides opportunities for hunting, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking and environmental education. The forest is used to demonstrate forest and wildlife management practices and also to protect important examples of the region's natural resources. Hooker Falls, Bridal Veil Falls, Triple Falls and High Falls are all spectacularly beautiful attractions. (www.dupontforest.com)

Horsepasture River and Falls

Adjacent to Gorges State Park is the Horsepasture River, a federal Wild and Scenic River and a North Carolina Natural and Scenic River. It has five major scenic waterfalls. Most of the river is located on US Forest Service property. See Chapter VIII for additional information.

Nantahala National Forest – Highlands District

The Highlands Ranger District of the Nantahala National Forest covers an area of about 116,000 acres in Macon, Jackson and Transylvania counties. Areas include the 39,000 – acre Roy Taylor Forest in Jackson County, adjacent to the Blue Ridge Parkway. In addition to the Horsepasture and Whitewater rivers and their falls, located close to Gorges State Park, the Highlands District contains numerous other scenic waterfalls. Within the Cullasaja Gorge along US 64 in Macon

County are Bridal Veil Falls and Dry Falls, so named because you can walk behind the falls, and Lower Cullasaja Falls. The drive along US 64 and through the Cullasaja Gorge is part of the Mountain Waters Scenic Byway. Within Cullasaja Gorge, the Cliffside Lake and Van Hook Glade recreation areas offer picnicking, swimming, fishing, camping and hiking. Not far from the Cullasaja Gorge, the Highlands Visitor Center offers exhibits and information about the forest.

Whiteside Mountain, located on the eastern continental divide off US 64 near Cashiers in Macon County, rises over 2,100 feet from the valley floor to the summit at 4,930 feet. A two-mile loop trail climbs above the 750-foot cliffs along the ridge. (www.cs.unca.edu/nfsnc/recreation/recreate.htm)

Pisgah National Forest – Pisgah District

The Pisgah District of the Pisgah National Forest, located north of Gorges State Park, offers a variety of outdoor recreation areas. The visitor center, near Brevard, offers information, exhibits and trails. The popular 161-site Davidson River Campground has hiking trails, fishing streams, picnic tables, and tubing on the river. Coontree and Sycamore Flats picnic areas are also located along the Davidson River.

The Forest Heritage Scenic Byway traverses the Pisgah National Forest in Transylvania and Haywood counties. The 79-mile loop winds through areas of outstanding natural beauty that are rich in forest history. In addition to the Cradle of Forestry in America, other popular attractions include Looking Glass Falls, Sliding Rock and the Pisgah Center for Wildlife Education and Fish Hatchery. Much of the Byway route follows old roads and logging railroads from the turn of the century.

Whitewater River and Falls

The spectacular Upper Whitewater Falls is located off NC 281 between Gorges State Park and the North Carolina – South Carolina state line. The falls drop 411 feet, the most of any waterfall east of the Mississippi. The US Forest Service operated access area provides a parking lot, restrooms and a paved pathway to an upper overlook. From there, steps and a trail lead down to the river and provide additional views of the falls and river. Further downstream, across the state line, the Lower Whitewater Falls drop another 400 feet.

(www.cs.unca.edu/nfsnc/recreation/whitewaterfalls.pdf)

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